

Claims

1. A reusable and returnable container for holding product therein during shipment and subsequently being returned generally empty of product for reuse, comprising:

5 a body having a bottom and at least two side walls coupled to the bottom, the side walls configured for being movable between an erected position for containing a product placed in the container and a collapsed position for reducing the size of the container for return;

10 a support structure coupled to a side wall;

a dunnage structure coupled to the support structure and positioned generally inside of the body, the dunnage structure supported by the support structure for engaging a product placed in the container for shipment when the side walls are in an erected position;

15 the support structure relaxing the dunnage structure when the side walls are in a collapsed position such that the dunnage structure is generally positioned in the reduced size container for return;

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whereby the container provides reusable dunnage which is usable with the container when it is shipped and subsequently remains with the container when it is returned for being reused when the container is again shipped.

2. The container of claim 1, wherein the support structure is coupled between the side walls to span across the container body when the side walls are in an erected position.

3. The container of claim 1 further comprising a rail element coupled to at least one of said two side walls, the support structure coupled to said rail element to be supported thereby.

4. The container of claim 1 wherein the support structure comprises an elongated flexible element extending between the side walls, the flexible element operably flexing when the side walls are collapsed to relax the dunnage structure therebetween.

5. The container of claim 4 wherein the elongated flexible element is a cable.

6. The container of claim 4 wherein the flexible element includes a tensioning element located at a position along its length for providing tension on the flexible element when the container side walls are erected.

7. The container of claim 3 wherein the rail element comprises a flexible element.

8. The container of claim 1 further comprising a plurality of support structures extending between the side walls and a plurality of dunnage structures coupled to the support structures.

9. The container of claim 1 wherein the dunnage structure is suspended from the support structure to hang down into the body when the side walls are in an erected position.

10. The container of claim 1 wherein the support structure is fixedly attached to a side wall.

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11. The container of claim 1 wherein said support structure is coupled proximate an upper edge of the side wall, the dunnage structure hanging downwardly from the support structure and having an effective depth approximately equal to the depth of the erected container body.

12. The container of claim 1 wherein the dunnage structure is a pouch for holding the product.

13. The container of claim 12 wherein the pouch is pliable to relax within the reduced size container for return.

14. The container of claim 1 wherein the side walls are hingedly coupled to the bottom for being movable between the erected and collapsed positions.

15. The container of claim 14 wherein the side walls hinge down to a position adjacent the bottom when in a collapsed position.

16. The container of claim 1, the dunnage structure being  
movably coupled to the support structure for moving with respect  
to the support structure within the container.

17. A reusable and returnable container for holding product therein during shipment and subsequently being returned generally empty of product for reuse comprising:

5                   a body configured for being manipulated into an erected position for containing a product placed therein during shipment and for subsequently being manipulated into a collapsed position for reducing the size of the container for return;

10                   an dunnage structure coupled to the body and operable for moving into an engagement position when the container body is erected to thereby engage a product placed in the container for shipment, the dunnage structure further operable for moving into a relaxed position when the container body is collapsed so that the container and dunnage structure may be returned together for reuse;

15                   whereby the container provides reusable dunnage which is usable with the container when it is shipped and subsequently remains with the container when it is returned for being reused when the container is again shipped.

18. The container of claim 17 wherein the body includes sides and a bottom, the sides being operable for moving, alternatively, between an erected state and a collapsed state when the body is manipulated between an erected position and a collapsed position, respectively.

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19. The container of claim 18 wherein the dunnage structure is coupled to the sides for moving to an engagement position when the sides are erected and moving to a relaxed position when the sides are collapsed.

20. The container of claim 17 wherein the dunnage structure is a pouch for holding the product.

21. The container of claim 17 further comprising sides and a support member extending between the sides of the container body, the dunnage structure coupled to the support member for being supported in an engagement position when the container body is erected.

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22. The container of claim 21 wherein the support member is movably coupled to said sides for moving the dunnage structures within the container.

23. The container of claim 21 wherein the support member comprises a flexible cable.

24. The container of claim 17 further comprising a plurality of adjacent dunnage structures in the container body for engaging a plurality of products during shipment.

25. The container of claim 17 where the body includes a bottom and side walls, at least two opposing side walls being hingedly attached to the bottom for moving between an erected state and a collapsed state.

26. The container of claim 17 wherein the body includes a bottom and a top and side walls extending therebetween, said side walls being operably manipulated to lower the top to the bottom and reduce the height of the container when the body is manipulated into a collapsed position.

27. The container of claim 26 where at least one of the side walls is foldable between said top and bottom to lower the top to the bottom.

28. The container of claim 26 wherein at least one of said side walls is hinged with respect to said body top and bottom and is operable to hinge toward one of said top and bottom so that the top of the body may be lowered to the bottom.

29. The container of claim 17 wherein the body includes opposing side walls forming a sleeve, at least two of said opposing side walls including vertical hinge lines and operable for folding along said hinge lines to reduce the depth of the sleeve in a collapsed position of the body.

30. A reusable and returnable rack container for supporting a product thereon during shipment and subsequently being returned generally empty of product for reuse comprising:

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a frame having a top member, a bottom member and a plurality of legs extending therebetween, the legs configured for being movable between an erected position for spacing the top member above the bottom member to support a product placed on the rack and a collapsed position for collapsing and reducing the size of the rack container for return;

10 a support structure coupled to said top member;

a dunnage structure coupled to the support structure and supported thereby for engaging a product placed on the rack for shipment when the legs are in an erected position;

15 the dunnage structure operable for relaxing when the legs are in a collapsed position such that the dunnage structure is generally positioned on the reduced size rack structure for return;

whereby the rack provides reusable dunnage which is usable with the container when it is shipped and subsequently remains with the container when it is returned for being reused

20 when the container is again shipped.

31. The rack container of claim 30 wherein the support element is coupled to the top member to span across the frame when the legs are in an erected position.

4 32. The rack container of claim 30 wherein the legs extend generally vertically between the top and bottom members, to space the top member above the bottom member.

3 33. The rack container of claim 30 wherein the dunnage structure is suspended from the support structure to hang down from the frame when the legs are in an erected position.

5 34. The rack container of claim 30 wherein the dunnage structure is a pouch for holding the product.

6 35. The rack container of claim 34 wherein the pouch is pliable to relax when the legs are collapsed to fit within the reduced size rack.

36. The rack container of claim 30 wherein said legs are hinged along their length to fold into a collapsed position.

37. The rack container of claim 30 wherein the legs comprise telescoping sections operable to telescope the length of the leg between the erected and collapsed positions.

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